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ABSTRACT

One rationale for implementing a particular evaluation approach is the empowerment of stakeholders. Evaluation as empowerment and possible links between empowerment and increased utilization of evaluation results are explored. Evaluation as empowerment assumes that individuals need to be personally productive and responsible in coping with their environment. If evaluation is seen as empowerment, the evaluator is recognized as the enabler. A case study of a participatory evaluation illustrates these concepts. In the case study, six young people conducted a survey of youth employment needs in a small upstate New York community. Evaluation use will only become more evident if participation involves stakeholders in empowering ways. Stakeholders must fully understand the evaluation process, be willing to support it, and feel enough sense of involvement and accountability to work toward changes. (SLD)

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Evaluation as Empowerment and the Evaluator as Enabler

by

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Increased utilization of evaluation results has been the primary rationale for the development of participatory or stakeholder approaches. The assumption is that participation by various constituents in the evaluation process will increase their understanding of and commitment to the use of evaluation results (Bryk, 1983; Gold, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Patton, 1978; Weiss, 1983). Another rationale for implementing a participatory evaluation approach is empowerment, particularly of relatively powerless stakeholders (Mark & Shotland, 1985). This paper will explore evaluation as empowerment and the possible linkages between empowerment and increased utilization of evaluation results.

Theoretical background

Evaluation has been conceptualized in a variety of ways by theorists in the field. Cronbach (1980) envisions evaluation as explanation, Scriven (1976) sees it in terms of social utility, House (1980) regards evaluation as judgement, and Stake (1983) suggests that evaluation is a process of understanding. In a more recent formulation, Guba and Lincoln (1985) discuss evaluation as negotiation. Here, I am proposing a conceptualization of evaluation

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Abstract

Increased utilization of evaluation results has been the primary rationale for the development of participatory or stakeholder approaches. The assumption is that participation by various constituents in the evaluation process will increase their understanding of and commitment to the use of evaluation results. Another rationale for implementing a participatory evaluation approach is empowerment. This paper explores evaluation as empowerment and the possible linkages between empowerment and increased utilization of evaluation results.

Evaluation has been conceptualized as explanation (Cronbach, 1980), social utility (Scriven, 1976), judgement (House, 1980), as a process of understanding (Stake, 1983) and negotiation (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Evaluation as empowerment assumes that underlying issues of power are a central question in conceptualizing what both the task of evaluation and the process are all about. The key question, then, is not whether evaluation is related to empowerment, but whose interests does the evaluation serve?

Viewing evaluation as empowerment has clear implications for the role of evaluator. While Cronbach (1980) sees the evaluator as public scientist, Eisner (1983) suggests the role of connoisseur/critic and Stake (1984) describes the evaluator as educator, the role of the evaluator in an empowerment formulation becomes that of enabler. Here, attention is focused primarily on the evaluation process (rather than the product), assisting stakeholders to participate and share power effectively.

Finally, possible linkages between empowerment and the increased use of evaluation results are examined, with stakeholder empowerment seen as a mediating variable between participation and utilization.

The conceptualization for this paper is based on a case study of a participatory evaluation in which empowerment of the stakeholders was a primary objective. Specific examples from the study are used to illustrate the theoretical principles discussed.

as empowerment. This conceptualization openly recognizes the issue of power in evaluation and focuses attention primarily on the evaluation process. The emphasis is on assisting stakeholders to participate in important ways and share power effectively.

Each view of evaluation involves certain assumptions about the purposes of evaluation and its implications. Evaluation as empowerment assumes that underlying issues of power are a central question in conceptualizing what both the task of evaluation and the process are all about. Knowledge is assumed to be a source of power and since an evaluation produces knowledge, whoever possesses or controls that information has power. The key question, then, is not whether evaluation is related to empowerment, but whose interests does the evaluation serve?

Because of the range of thinkers discussing empowerment, the concept has yet to be clearly defined (Cochran, 1986). There are, however, some underlying assumptions common to all. One such assumption is that individuals can understand their own needs better than anyone else (particularly the experts) and consequently they should have the power both to define and act upon them (Cochran, 1986; Fernandes & Tandon, 1981; Hall, 1981; Society for Participatory Research in Asia [PRIA], 1985). Second, all people are assumed to possess strengths upon which they can build (Freire, 1982; PRIA, 1985; Tandon, 1981; Torre, 1986). Evaluation as empowerment also assumes that individuals have a need to be personally productive, to take responsibility and contribute something useful to their reality (Whitham, 1982). Perhaps the key assumption involves the importance of recognizing personal knowledge

and experience as valid and useful in coping effectively with one's environment (Freire, 1973; PRIA, 1985; Tandon, 1981; Torre, 1986).

Though some authors see empowerment as a more static state of being (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977), most refer to it as a process (Baker-Miller, 1982; Cochran, 1986; Kieffer, 1984; PRIA, 1985; Tandon, 1981; Rappoport, 1981; Riley, 1984; Vanderslice, 1984; Whitham, 1982). This process focuses on different levels, from individual change (Baker-Miller, 1982; Kieffer, 1984) to a group or collective emphasis (Fernandes & Tandon, 1981; Freire, 1985; Hall, 1981; Vanderslice, 1984; Whitham, 1982), and to a focus on organizational or institutional change (Barr, Cochran, Riley & Whitham, 1984; Hall, 1981; Freire, 1985; PRIA, 1985). PRIA sees awareness (of issues in one's daily life and their connections with larger structures) and action (toward changing those relationships) as the key elements in empowerment.

In many discussions of empowerment, it is envisioned as a series of stages (Cochran, 1986), components (Torre, 1986), aspects (Kieffer, 1984) or interrelated actions (Vanderslice, 1984). Riley (1984) identifies empowerment as an "ecologically complex process" involving the "interlinked contribution" of the individual, mediating structures (small groups) and larger macro system influences. Whitham's work (1982) deals specifically with empowerment as it relates to young people and is therefore particularly relevant to the case study cited in this paper. "Youth empowerment is the process by which young people learn, through active participation in the relationships, events and institutions

that affect their lives, to develop and apply their capacity to transform themselves and the world in which they live" (p.1).

Drawing on these sources, then, empowerment is defined, for purposes of this paper, as:

> an interactive process through which people experience personal and social change, enabling them to take action to achieve influence over the organizations and institutions which affect their lives and the communities in which they live.

The challenge for evaluators interested in empowerment is to determine how to operationalize this definition in the evaluation context. A deeper understanding of the concept of empowerment offers important information in this regard.

Phases of the process of empowerment

Writers investigating the question of empowerment draw upon empirical research to examine the process in more detail. Several studies outline various phases in the empowerment process. Perhaps the most detailed study of stages involved in the empowerment process is the Family Matters Project (Cochran, 1986; Cochran & Henderson, 1986). Here, the empowerment process is conceived as a series of five stages, progressing from personal change to social action. Stage I involves positive changes in individual self-perception and Stage II refers to changes in family relationships. Stage III moves the participant into interaction with others beyond the family. Stage IV is seen as information gathering about relevant community issues, followed by change-oriented community action in Stage V (Cochran & Henderson, 1986, pp.106-108). "Thus, there [are] different aspects of the empowerment process, beginning

with the way in which individuals view themselves and progressing through relations with nearby others to interactions with more distant organizations and institutions" (Cochran, 1986, p.22).

Vanderslice (1984) notes that different writers have identified various "interrelated actions" contributing to empowerment. These include the recognition and valuing of one's skills, knowledge and resources as well as their expansion, a broadening of interpersonal networks, and becoming involved with one's environment.

In addition to feelings of self worth and legitimacy, Torre (1986) identifies a critical understanding of macro structures as crucial to empowerment. Such a critical perspective leads to a further component of empowerment, reflective action directed towards responsible social change.

The "empowerment cycle" discussed by Whitham (1982) involves three phases. "Learning" about oneself and one's environment through interaction with adults is followed by "realizing power" or applying new knowledge and skills and taking responsibility. The third phase is "acting," initiating changes in the community.

All of these conceptualizations of empowerment can be seen as congruent with Cochran's model. That is, they cluster into actions at the levels of the individual (recognition of the value of one's own skills, knowledge and resources, as well as learning new ones; feelings of self-confidence and legitimacy); the interpersonal (broadening networks to overcome individual isolation; recognition); and the environmental (involvement in successful interactions with one's environment; action oriented towards social change).

In the evaluation context, the stakeholder process can be structured to enhance empowerment at each level. Individual stakeholder's knowledge and skills can be recognized and developed through participation in certain technical evaluation tasks, such as questionnaire design or data analysis. Interaction of stakeholder groups is likely to facilitate networking among them, while pursuing specific actions toward program or organizational change can result in empowerment at the environmental level. These actions can be operationalized in an evaluation by utilizing specific strategies to support stakeholder empowerment at each stage. Examples of possible strategies are discussed below in relation to the case study. The focus on process also suggests a different emphasis and set of tasks for the evaluator.

Implications for the Role of Evaluators

Viewing evaluation as a process of empowerment has clear implications for the role of the evaluator. While Cronbach (1980) sees the evaluator as public scientist, Eisner (1983) suggests the role of connoisseur/critic, Greene (1986) describes a facilitator role and Stake (1984) characterizes the evaluator as educator, the role of the evaluation in an empowerment formulation becomes that of enabler. The evaluator as enabler goes beyond the educator or facilitator roles which focus exclusively on process in that the enabling role also includes concrete action to change a given situation. The enabling role thus involves praxis, a process of reflection and action, combining education of stakeholders as individuals and as a group, with action directed towards change in the environmental context.

Case Study example

The case study involves a participatory evaluation in which a group of six young people conducted a survey of youth employment needs in a small upstate New York community. As the evaluator/consultant, I trained and supervised the youth throughout the process. In order to examine questions of empowerment in a stakeholder evaluation, I also studied the "side effects" that their participation had on them as individuals and as a group as well the effects of stakeholder participation on the program and organization. Side effects were defined as changes or results stemming from participation in an evaluation process which have not necessarily been intended by evaluators or identified in the literature, and which may or may not be related to the main effect of empowerment.

The first step in analyzing the data was to categorize the side effects found. These are listed in Table 1. Once a set of categories of side effects had been developed, linkages between side effects and empowerment were established by comparing specific side effects with empowering actions at each level (for details, see Whitmore, 1988).

Table 1 about here

Empowering effects for individual participants included increased feelings of self-efficacy and the learning of new knowledge and skills. For the group, there was enhanced group cohesion as well as recognition (by both members themselves and

outsiders) of their capacity to do competent work. At the individual and group levels, then, the data indicated that the youth were clearly empowered through the participatory evaluation process. At the environmental or action level, measured through actual changes in the program and organization, empowerment was less clear. Though there were empowering effects at these levels, these translated only occasionally into participation by the young people in decision making forums or into specific change-oriented action. One example of empowerment at this level was the involvement of one group member on a county planning committee developing a three year plan for youth in the area. Because of her participation, youth employment was given high priority in the committee's final report. More emphasis with the young people on the importance of follow up activities would have strengthened empowerment at this level.

My role as trainer/consultant for the youth group was that of enabler. Such a role involved assisting participants to develop individual and interpersonal competencies and take effective action towards change at the programmatic and organizational levels. In this case study, the primary vehicle utilized was a set of strategies designed to facilitate the young people's taking maximum control of decisions involved in conducting the evaluation project. It is important to note that the particular agency involved supported these goals, offering an unusually receptive environment for such a project. The strategies included (a) a staff/evaluator team, (b) having a concrete and responsible task to do which was of importance to the organization, (c) a written contract (including payment), (d) a structured sequence of evaluation tasks, (e)

attention to group process, and (f) publicity. The staff/evaluator team consisted of regular debrieting and planning sessions with the agency staff member most closely involved with the young people. Her extensive understanding of the young people as individuals and as a group complemented my knowledge of evaluation methodology maximizing the ettectiveness of our work with them. Having an important task to do and a contract increased the group's sense of responsibility and its accountability for producing a specific product. By carefully structuring the specific evaluation tasks which needed to be done, I could assist the participants to make design and analysis decisions. Specifically, for example, in designing the questionnaire, they needed to understand how to trame questions, learn the difference between open ended and closed questions and the advantages and limitations of each. The process of doing this was primarily experiential, trying out questions in role plays and then analyzing the responses. Here, the youth were particularly good at playing the monosyllabic teenaged respondant which helped them not only to trame well phrased questions but also gave them interviewing practice. Data analysis consisted of figuring out what the numbers meant and sorting open ended responses into categories. Attention to group process meant that group building exercises and retlection on their collective interaction were included as part of each meeting. Publicity involved a feature article in the local newspaper highlighting their findings, as well as wide distribution of the report to relevant agencies and community groups.

Table 2 illustrates the linkages between these strategies and empowerment. Here each strategy is linked to certain empowering side effects at each level. These are then associated with a stage in the empowerment process. Thus, individual and group side effects contribute to those stages in the empowerment process, while programmatic and organizational side effects reflect the environmental phase of empowerment.

Table 2 about here

These strategies are transferable to other contexts, with details varying to fit the particular task and participants. Whatever the specific strategies are used, however, the evaluator as enabler must develop them from the framework of basic assumptions and goals of evaluation as empowerment.

Linkages between empowerment and utilization

There are several ways that the empowerment process can be related to evaluation use. Utilization in the evaluation literature has been defined in three ways, conceptual use, persuasive or symbolic use and instrumental use (Leviton & Hughes, 1981). Conceptual use refers more to the process of utilization, while instrumental use is more outcome oriented. Persuasive or symbolic use can relate to both process and outcome in that it involves processes of interpersonal influence as well as the use of more concrete evaluation evidence to build support for specific actions. The phases of the empowerment process parallel this

conceptualization, with the individual and interpersonal or group stages of empowerment contributing to conceptual and symbolic utilization, while the action stage parallels instrumental and also symbolic use. If stakeholder participation is assumed to enhance evaluation utilization, empowerment could be hypothesized as a mediating variable, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 here

Specifically, for example, individual empowerment processes such as learning new knowledge contributes directly to conceptual use. Persuasive or symbolic use involves interpersonal processes, "getting others to go along with the implications of evaluation" (Leviton & Hughes, 1981, p.529). Both increased cohesiveness, recognition or publicity contribute to interpersonal or group empowerment and to persuasive use. Instrumental use reflects specific programmatic or organizational change and is related to the environmental action phase of the empowering process.

Another way to conceptualize empowerment as a mediating variable between participation and utilization is shown in Figure 2. Empowerment increases accountability for evaluation use in that participants who exercise control over an evaluation process also assume responsibility for following up and taking concrete action. The use of strategies such as having a concrete task to do and a written contract are particularly related to accountability. Having responsibility for decision making increases participants' sense of ownership of the evaluation and what occurs as a result (Greene,

1987; Leviton & Hughes, 1981). As in Figure 1, instrumental use parallels the environmental or action phase of empowerment.

Figure 2 about here

Conclusion

Participation in and of itself does not necessarily increase evaluation use. Indeed, token participation is likely to result in stakeholder indifference or cooptation (Weiss, 1983). Only if participation involves stakeholders in empowering ways will evaluation use be more evident. Empowerment and evaluation utilization are thus part of the same process. Increasing evaluation use in all its manifestations will occur only when stakeholders fully understand an evaluation process, are willing to support it openly, and feel enough sense of involvement and hence accountability to pressure for implementation of specific programmatic or organizational change.

Table 1

A Typology of Side Effects

Individual Effects

Positive	Negative
*Self-efficacy	Interpersonal issues
Good feelings;confidence	Task
Productivity	Fear of strangers
*Learning	Tedious/confusing
Task	Time/effort
Process	
*Personal benefits/enjoyment	
*Staff/evaluator benefits	

Group Effects

*Cohesion	Group interaction
Identity	Conflicts
Improved interrelationships	Uneven performance
Productivity	Overestimation of group
*Recognition/credibility	Risk of Failure
	Harm to group
	Time/effort required

Programmatic and Organizational Effects

*Consistent with goals	Costs
*Increased resources	Staff time/effort
*Organizational growth/learning	Financial/in-Kind

Publicity
Internal issues
Expectations
Technical quality
Accountability
Program change
Stakeholder empowerment

Evaluation Methods & Professional Role

New techniques
Professional role
Flexibility

Professional's satisfaction	Professional's frustration
Professional's learning	

* Indicates empowering side effect. If positive, effects listed in the middle can also be empowering for programs and organizations.

Table 2

Strategy	Side Effects: Individual	Group	Program/Org
Staff/eval team	Self-efficacy Learning Staff/eval benefits	Cohesion Recognition	Consistent with goals Increases resources Org'l growth/learning
Concrete task	Self-efficacy Learning Personal rewards	Cohesion Recognition	Consistent with goals Increases resources Org'l growth/learning
Contract	Self-efficacy Learning Personal rewards	Cohesion Recognition	Consistent with goals Increases resources Accountability
Structured sequence of tasks	Self-efficacy Learning	Cohesion Recognition	Increases resources Technical quality
Attention to process	Self-efficacy Learning Fun Staff/eval benefits	Cohesion (Increased productivity)	Consistent with goals Increases resources
Publicity	Self-efficacy Learning	Cohesion Recognition	Publicity
	Individual Empowerment	Group Empowerment	Change-oriented Action

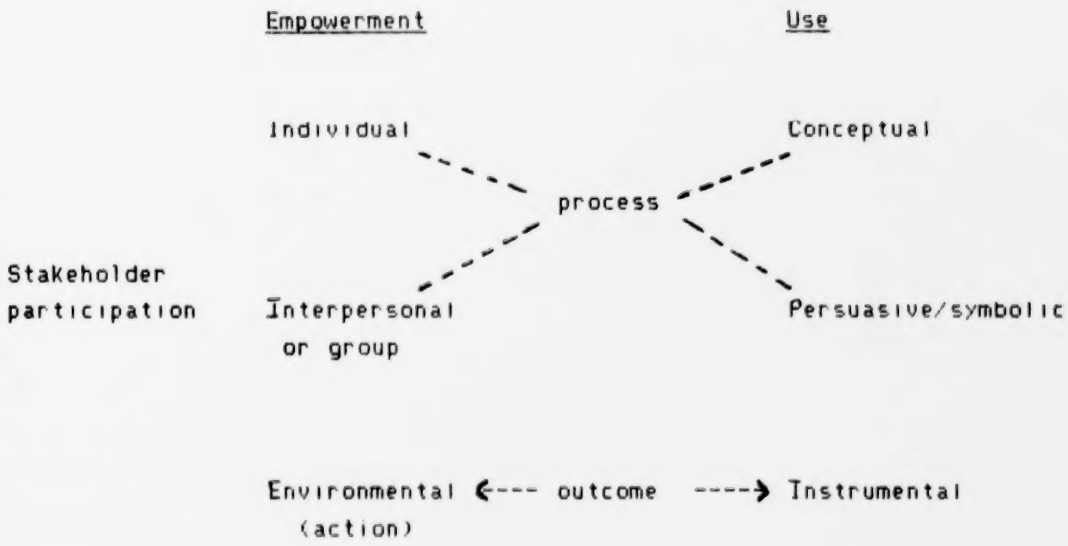

Figure 1

Linkages between stakeholder participation, empowerment and evaluation use

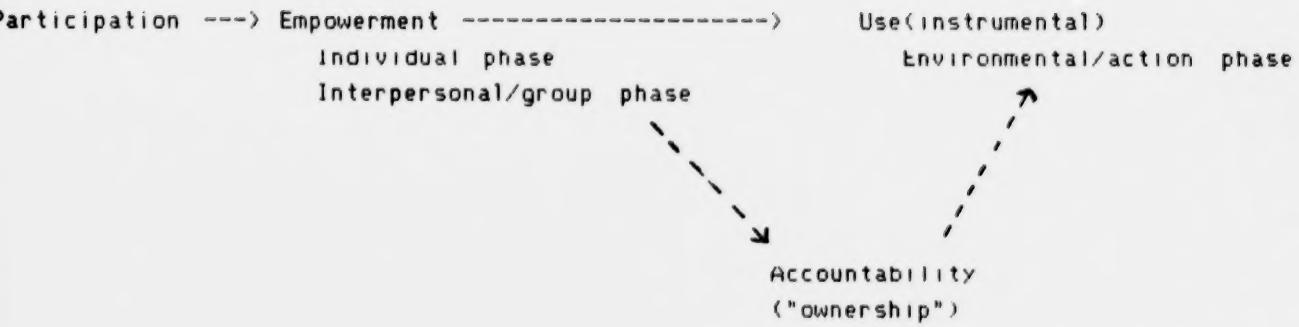

Figure 2

Linkages between Participation, Empowerment and Evaluation Use

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